

--Summary of the Invention--.

Replace the paragraph beginning on page 4, line 6, with:

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--The invention achieves its objectives with a method for switching a plurality of packet-oriented signals, in particular for switching and routing in local area networks based on the Ethernet standard. In the method, a respective signal can be supplied to a plurality of port units, which each have a predetermined number of ports, at one port, a plurality of ports or all the ports, and in which a signal is connected from a port on a port unit to a port on another port unit by a central switching unit coupled to the port units, with signal transmission between the port units and the central switching unit, and vice versa, being carried out in steps by the transmission of data blocks. Each port unit ascertains the address information item for each data packet supplied to one of its ports and uses this address information item to determine the port unit to which the packet needs to be transmitted. Each port unit stores the data packet as a whole, or segmented into a plurality of cells, in a buffer memory associated with said port unit. Each port unit compiles, at predetermined intervals of time, availability information that indicates to which of the other port units at least one data packet or cell needs to be transmitted. The port units transmit this availability information to the central switching unit. The central switching unit evaluates

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the availability information and uses a prescribed specification to ascertain authorization information which indicates from which port units (transmitting port units) a respective data packet or cell can be transmitted to which other port unit (receiving port units) in the next step or in a particular one of the next steps without blocking occurring. The central switching unit transmits the authorization information at least to the relevant transmitting port units. The transmitting port units transmit the particular released data packets or cells to the central switching unit. The central switching unit connects the necessary paths between the transmitting port units and the receiving port units and transmits the data packets or cells to the respective receiving port units through the connected paths. The receiving port units evaluate the address information in the received data packets or cells and assign the data packets or cells to the relevant ports, if necessary recombining the cells received in a plurality of steps into data packets and outputting the data packets via the relevant ports.

The invention also includes an apparatus for carrying out the method having a plurality of port units connected to a central switching unit. The port units and the central switching unit each have a control unit designed for carrying out the steps of the method. ~